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## Gender Differences in Child Care and Household Tasks: An Exploratory Study from an Indo-U.S. Perspective

Danielle Lippman

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Gender Differences in Child Care and Household Tasks: An Exploratory Study from an Indo-  
U.S. Perspective

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at  
Syracuse University

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and Renée Crown University Honors  
Spring 2019

Honors Capstone Project in Human Development and Family Science

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## GENDER DIFFERENCES

### **Abstract**

The rate of immigrants coming from Asia in to the U. S. is growing at a rapid rate. However, research on Asian-Americans is scarce, particularly South-Asian-Americans. This group of immigrants face the same issues that the majority of immigrants coming to the United States face, but also face some additional unique challenges due to cultural background, religion, family expectations, and heritage. Most of these immigrants belong to transnational families. There are many discrepancies between what is expected of husbands and wives, especially when it comes to raising children and doing household chores in the Indian context. It is important to explore how these strategies remain the same or change with the immigration experience. This will help with further research and in designing public policies and therapeutic interventions for these immigrant families.

**Keywords:** South Asian immigrants, gendered division of labor, gender discrepancies, and Indian Sub-Continent.

### **Executive Summary**

South Asian immigrants are one of the fastest growing immigrant populations in the United States, but they are among the least studied populations. This poses a problem, as there are then limited resources aimed to specifically help this population in terms of therapy and public policy. Like most immigrants coming to the United States, immigrants from the Indian Sub-Continent face a number of issues that all immigrants face in terms of balancing the new culture of where they're with their old culture of their homeland, but immigrants from this particular area face specific challenges when it comes to parenting due to the traditions and cultures that are back in India.

India is a collectivist and traditional society, which means that this type of culture emphasizes the needs of the society as a whole over the needs and wants of the individuals. In comparison, the United States which is a Western and an individualistic society, which means that the emphasis is on the self and independence over the needs of the group. When immigrating from the Indian Sub-Continent to the United States, the stark contrast of these two cultures can cause culture shock for these particular immigrants, particularly if these immigrants are planning to become or already are parents. They must decide how they are going to parent their children. How much of their old culture and traditions will they instill in their children and how much will they let American culture impact their child-rearing choices? I found that a majority of the parents were in a state of transition, neither fully immersed in the culture of the United States, nor completely holding onto the culture back home. For example, a majority of the participants came from having an arranged marriage, but when asked if they would want that for their children, the overwhelming response was that in America it wasn't something you can do, but they wanted to have a large amount of say in who their child ended up with. The idea of what

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language was spoken at home also speaks to the idea of transition as well. The parents whose children were bilingual had purposely instilled this in their children. Those whose children were not, felt regret and felt as if their kids were missing part of the culture of their homes, but recognized that there wasn't much they could do at that point.

Gender differences and the interactions between the mothers and fathers also allowed for the idea of transition to be explored. In India, a majority of people have traditional gender roles with the man being the breadwinner and the woman staying at home and taking care of the children and the household. However, that's not what the norm is in the US. The participants in the study were slowly making transitions from traditional gender roles to more balanced ones, with more participants discussing having equal roles than not. This goes for the way chores were performed as well. A minority of participants spoke of the traditional ways, with the wife taking care of the children and the home and the husband only taking care of the family financially, but the majority of the families in the study discussed sharing childcare, rotating chores, and cooking based off of who had the time and not based off of the expectations that women should be the ones to cook. A major finding was that women participants were more comfortable with the transition to the culture in the United States in terms of equality than the men in the study

Since this study is one with its interviews coming from a previous larger study performed years prior, a limitation of the study was that not all participants were asked the same questions. Especially since the larger study was generally about the overarching immigrant experience, and mine is specifically on parenting challenges in relation to gender differences, not all the interviews touched on that subject. For future research I would recommend having more standard research questions in the first place. I also would want to focus on the impact these parenting

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choices had on the children growing up, so interviewing the children of these immigrants would bring about really interesting and helpful data to build off of the findings in this study.

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### **Advice to Future Honors Students**

Hello young honors nuggets! If you're reading this, I'm assuming that you're stressed about honors, your thesis, and wondering if you should drop out of it. **DO NOT DROP OUT!** Take a deep breath and listen to what I'm about to tell you. I was in your shoes and felt that way multiple times. It is ok okay, and it is normal. Do not fret. What you should know, is that yes, it is a lot of work, yes, you might have some slight mental breakdowns along the way, but its super worth it. The honors program has given me so much in my time at Syracuse. I met one of my closest friends living in Sadler freshman year, I have taken some of the most interesting classes with the coolest, down to earth, kind, and compelling professors I've ever met (Burton, I'm looking at you), and found such amazing support from the staff in the department at honors. Your thesis will push you and you might want to give up but think about how freaking proud you will feel after you can hit submit and feel that weight lifted off your shoulders! My advice is to pick something that you are truly passionate about and then you won't feel so stressed about your project because you will be working on something you love. If that does not work, incentivize yourself with breaking down bits and pieces of your work and rewarding yourself with chocolate. That helps. A lot. Anyway, good luck and don't give up because honors is totally worth it!

### Introduction

Immigrants come to America, the land of opportunity, to pursue higher education, in pursuit of better jobs, and in general, a better life for themselves and their families, it can cause a shift in ethnic identity. International migration to a new culture requires immigrants to adjust and adapt to their new surroundings. “Ethnic identity is part of a positive self-concept that consciously anchors an individual to a particular ethnic group” and “central to this identity is a sense of belonging” (Dasgupta, 1998 p.953). When a family moves to a different country, they go through one of the four processes of acculturation (Barry, 1993). These four processes are: Assimilation, which is to reject your own culture and identify solely with the new host culture, marginalization, which is to reject both cultures, separation, which is to reject the host culture and identify solely with one’s own culture, and lastly integration, which is to become bicultural.

#### *Immigrants from the Indian Sub-Continent to U.S*

Since 2009, the largest number of new immigrants entering the United States is from Asian countries; immigrants from the Indian sub-continent are the second largest minority group, among Asians (Lopez, Ruiz & Patten, 2017). With a few exceptions (Dasgupta, 1998; Gupta, 1997; Mehrotra & Calasanti, 2010), there is very little research on the situation of Asian-Indian immigrants with respect to gender division of house work and child care responsibilities. Gupta (1997) used a feminist analysis to understand Indian immigrants’ ethnic identities among immigrants living in New York City. Through interviews she reported that one will not understand what counts as ethnic culture by simply using the ethnicity paradigm. She noted that the women in the study continually stated that they felt that the brunt of maintaining the culture from their home country fell onto them and not their husbands, thus creating more pressure for them in the household.

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Mehrotra and Calasanti (2010) interviewed 38 first-generation Indian immigrants and focused their interviews on the family and their gender ethnic identities. They found that during migration, ethnic identity became salient and that the immigrants must work to either maintain or change their ethnic identities. Although this can alter family structure, it sheds light on the fact that the family and family roles can be a source of strength but also of oppression. This is similar to the results reported in the previous study (Gupta, 1997) wherein respondents reported that ethnic identity is gendered and that the women and men play a different role, particularly in immigrant families from the Indian Sub-continent.

Dasgupta (1998) studied families and gender roles in immigrant families from the Indian Sub-continent. Data collection was done using 3 surveys and these were given to 48 educated and middle-class Indian immigrant families. These three surveys were on, the respondents' attitude towards women, dating, and anxiety. Results reported include gender asymmetries in the family and caution when attempting to integrate with the new culture. These studies are almost 20 years old and more current data is needed to examine the gender differences, if any in housework and child care responsibilities among immigrant families from the Indian sub-continent.

Gupta (2006) examined marital problems and acculturation among South Asian immigrants. Problems related to acculturation and marital issues include but were not limited to isolation and lack of couple activities, family members being at different levels of acculturation, empty nest syndrome and taking each other for granted. This was a case study and notes were taken on one South Asian immigrant couple who had filed for divorce because of irreconcilable differences. While it provides an in-depth look at acculturation and how the stressors of

immigration to the United States can impact a couple and a marriage, it only provides clinical notes on one couple, and the data is not generalizable.

### *Issues Women are Facing*

Mehrotra (2016) examined the norms in South Asian cultures and how these are communicated to women in those cultures. It especially focused on the aspect of heteronormativity, marriageability, looks, and the ways in which it impacted these women (Mehrotra, 2016). It also looked at the messages communicated to the women and if these messages are indirect, direct, or a mixture of both. It was reported that South Asian immigrants are one of the fastest growing immigrant populations but are one of the smallest populations in terms of populations being studied in the social sciences (Mehrotra 2016). The study found that South Asian women consciously and subconsciously have a cultural script that they have learned they must stick to behavior-wise in their public and private lives.

Tummala-Narra (2013) investigated the gender issues that South Asian immigrants are faced with. The study examined how these women must navigate cultural changes that not only are different from their native country in comparison to their new country but comparing the culture of their new peers to that of their parents (Tummala-Narra, 2013). It discussed the vital role that the family unit plays in the lives of these immigrant and first-generation women, especially in shaping identity (Tummala-Narra, 2013). It also looked at racism and stereotypes and the traumatic impact of the same on the participants' lives. A similar study was conducted by Murti (2012) and specifically examined the situation of women of South Asian descent who are doctors in the United States and how they are treated. the researcher reported detailed accounts of racism, sexism, stereotyping, and demonstrated that while male South Asian doctors faced some of these issues, they were magnified tenfold for female South Asian doctors.

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### *Reason for this Study*

Almost every single study that was cited in the literature review mentions that South Asian immigrants is one of the fastest growing immigrant populations but is also studied the least in the social sciences. That is disproportionately unfair to such a large number of immigrants who face their own struggles when coming to a new country and trying to manage raising a family, dealing with new cultural norms, racism, and sexism. So many of these studies also focused on very specific aspects of the South Asian immigrant experience and either only interviewed women, did a case study with just one couple, or had a very small number of participants. The literature on this topic needs to continue to grow and expand so that this population can be represented. That is why an exploratory study on the gendered nature of housework and child care is very important. This will also allow for the creation of policies and programs that will support this minority group. If there is a very limited number of research that has been done about what this particular group of immigrants wants and needs, there will be no effective way to implement programs to support this group of people. What impacts them the most positively and/or negatively in term of gender issues and how can the United States best support this every growing immigrant population.

### *The purpose of this study is to explore:*

1. The differences that occur when raising a family in the Indian Sub-continent versus raising a family after immigrating to the United States.
2. The gender discrepancies that occur within Indian immigrant families in terms of division of labor, childrearing, and cultural norms.
3. The interaction of gender and ethnic minority status in terms of house work and child care responsibilities.

### Method

The data for this study comes from a much larger study about immigrants from the Indian Sub-Continent. Participants for the study were recruited from different ethnic organizations such as India Community Religious and Cultural Center, Kairali, Bengali Organization, Nepali Organization, and Bhutanese Organization and from religious centers such as Hindu mandir, Swaminarayan mandir, and mosques. This recruitment was done using a flyer. Researchers also travelled to nearby places where there are large populations of immigrants from the Indian Sub-continent such as New York City, Rochester, New Jersey, and Buffalo for recruitment purposes. Snowball sampling techniques was used.

After obtaining consent, a survey was used to collect quantitative data from the participants online ( $N = 168$ ), and after that, the participants were given the option to participate in a qualitative telephone or in-person interview. These interviews took between 45 to 60 minutes and adults 18 and older who identified as first-generation immigrants from the Indian Sub-continent were invited to participate. Interviewers took detailed notes and audio recorded the interviews for accuracy. After this, the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Thirty people opted to be interviewed. Data from these qualitative interviews were used for this current analysis, which was then narrowed down to 19 people (only those who were in a relationship and a parent) for this exploratory study. All interviews were conducted in English.

#### *Questions for qualitative interview*

Open-ended questions were asked to the participants during the interview, with prompts used for follow-up. These include:

In your own words describe-

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1. Your immigration experience (prompts: when it started, under what conditions, who initiated – self or other family member, push and pull factors).
2. What challenges did you experience as a result of your immigration experience and later integration (prompt: role overload, financial strain, and the emotional impact, loss of social support, health issues. Of these, which one is the most salient? Why?) What would you describe as a good day during that time? What would you describe as a bad day?
3. What are the supports you receive that eased the challenges faced during the immigration experience and later integration? How did it help?
4. What support/benefit is currently unavailable that you would like to receive? Why?
5. How do you maintain contact with your extended family in India? Is it sufficient? (if relevant: What are the challenges with respect to child care/elder care)
6. What is your opinion about specific roles played by women and men in the family?
7. When there are disagreements within the family, in terms of gender roles or with raising children, how do you and your spouse go about handling them?
8. Do you think parenting here is different from Indian culture?

### *Participants*

Interviews from 19 participants were used in this study (11 females and 8 males); only those in a significant relationship and a parent were included in the study. All participants were born in the Indian Sub-Continent with 13 interviewees coming from India, 3 from Bhutan, and 3 from Nepal. Two of the participants were students in the U.S at the time of their interviews, while the other 17 were non-students. The participants came to the United States for reasons such as displacement (in the case of the 3 participants from Bhutan who came to the U.S as refugees),

higher education opportunities, hopes of a better life for their children, for better employment opportunities, or to be reunited with family members who had previously immigrated to the U.S.

### *Data Analysis*

This study followed the five-step analytical process for data) Creswell, 2018). The five-step approach includes:

1. *Creating the raw data.* As previously stated, the interviews for this empirical study are from a larger study on immigrants from the Indian sub-continent. Therefore, the interviews were previously completed by a team of researchers and transcribed by a professional service.
2. *Preparation of data Analysis.* While the data was transcribed before I began working on this project, they were not in a uniform format. Before beginning any data analysis, I went through all 39 transcribed interviews and put them in a legible and uniform format. Next, the 39 interviews were narrowed down to 19, because previous criteria for this exploratory study stated that participants must be parents.
3. *Generation of brief ideas.* The initial research team, (myself and Dr. Ramadoss and Ms. Tian) met to create a coding scheme of general schemes that were overarching themes in the interviews. Examples of these overarching themes include marital relationship, parenting, household chores, and engagement in paid workforce. Each of these general themes was then broken down into subthemes/categories.
4. *Data coding.* These themes were then translated into coding schemes. Sections of the interviews that fell under important coding schemes were highlighted and marked with an explanation as to why they fit under the coding scheme.



5. *Interpretation of themes.* After data coding was completed, the research team met to discuss the key themes and the ways in which they show up specifically in the interviews. This allows for full discussion and congruency between the research team so that the data can be solidified.

### *Trustworthiness*

To improve the trustworthiness and credibility of the qualitative data, another member was added to the research team. Rui Tan, a PhD student in the Human Development and Family Science department was recruited. This ensured that the data is utilized with integrity. It also allowed for another viewpoint to be added to the research team. The trustworthiness of the data was increased as well by the fact that all data was coded separately using the exact same coding scheme, but there was no contact kept between coders during that time, until meetings were held to discuss findings. Inter-rater reliability was 96%.

## Findings

### Raising Children

#### *Mate Selection Choices for Children*

Arranged marriages is still custom that widely occurs in the Indian Sub-Continent. Of the 19 participants in the study, 12 participants did not mention the status of their marriage, but of the 7 who did disclose the status of their marriage, only one couple had a marriage by self-choice. The other 6 participants had a traditional arranged marriage. For each of these participants, they were then questioned about whether or not they would want their children to have an arranged marriage or a self-choice marriage. Five of those participants made it clear that they would want self-choice for their children, but simply for the reason because in America, it is difficult to create an arranged marriage situation for your children.

“Ya you know kids born here, you cannot arrange their marriage... and I don’t really personally, I don’t really believe in that, I think if somebody they are going to spend life it’s good to know them, ahead of time, but they are with some limitations as American culture has too much independence.” (Female, Indian)

Another participant in the study previously had an arranged marriage but had gotten a divorce. She was remarried by self-choice but reflects on why she would not want an arranged marriage for her children and why she was so adamant about self-choice now.

“No, I don’t want arranged marriage. Like it failed for me, mine was an arranged marriage so it failed. I don’t want any arranged marriages for my children. I like the American way they can choose their own.” (Female, Indian)

The last outlook that a participant had on arranged marriage vs. self-choice marriage for their children was that they would want to give their children a choice. If their children wanted a marriage by self-choice, then they would be supportive of that, but if they wanted an arranged marriage, then the participant would also support that for them.

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“No, I’m flexible I don’t think I should know, but I had arranged marriage, but it was not on me put on me traditionally it was a choice I took off getting into arranged marriage and I’ll give the same choice to my kids if they want they can have arranged marriage, if they want they can find somebody for themselves.” (Female, Indian)

The overarching theme that occurred in the interviews was that the parents understood that arranged marriages for their children was not necessarily the most practical thing if they were living in the United States. Although, almost all the aforementioned participants had come from arranged marriages and had the understanding that self-choice was what their children would have, there was still an expectation that they would be somewhat involved in mate selection for their children. There was very much a sense of transition, because although they will not be choosing the mate for their children, they wanted to be involved, have somewhat of a say, and some participants had boundaries and guidelines in terms of a potential mate that they wanted their children to follow. Some participants wanted their children to marry someone who was of their same religion and ethnicity, or not of certain religions, some participants wanted to make sure their children would marry and date people who would be making certain amounts of money, and some parents just wanted to make sure that their children and their potential mates were being responsible and mature with their decisions. The overarching theme was that participants recognized that in the United States, parents cannot have as much say and control over how their children will select their mates, but that they still want to be involved in one way or another.

### *Acculturation*

Acculturation is the psychological, social, and cultural change that occurs when someone moves from their country of origin to a new one. It is a stressor that affects an immigrant in a variety of ways. It can cause emotional, physical, and mental stress for a person. Additional barriers that can impact acculturation is parent status, language barriers, cultural changes from a

collectivist to an individualist culture. All of these impact the immigrants in general, but in the case of this study, where all the participants are parents, there is the added layer of how acculturation impacts parenting. In the interviews, participants compare and contrast what it is like raising children in the United States versus raising children in the Indian Sub-Continent.

There were three main themes surrounding acculturation parenting. These themes were language, cultural differences, education, and healthcare. Two participants in particular praised the healthcare system here in the US, especially training for new parents provided in hospitals after giving birth. One mother said:

“No, it was awesome the support system is awesome here. They educate you about how to feed your baby, they come to your house to show and show you how to feed your baby they’re nurses available it was very nice yeah no complaints here.” (Female, Indian)

This particular participant has fully embraced the US system. Another participant in the study, had similar feelings about healthcare in the US, but builds upon the previous participant’s statement by reflecting as well upon how it would have been easier if she and her husband had decided to raise their baby in Nepal.

“Here we have better... I think here we have better facilities while you are having a baby like in hospital wise and like medical wise when we look at other aspects but like in Nepal if I had a baby in Nepal I would get more family support so that is the only difference. Here I could not get help from my family because they were far.” (Female, Nepali)

The sentiment of isolation from extended families was not just a common theme for the participants in this particular study, but it is also a common theme that occurs for many living in transnational families.

While few participants were comparing the healthcare system in terms of the way in which it influences how they parent their children, even more participants shared their feelings about the differences in the education systems in the United States versus the Indian Sub-

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Continent. Participants were in agreement that schooling in the Indian Sub-Continent was a lot more rigorous than in the United States. Where disagreement between participants begins to occur, is that some participants seem to embrace the fact that the US school system is less intense, while others wanted the education system to be more like their native homeland. Below, a participant reflects on her schooling and the schooling that her children are getting in the US.

“I really like the education system here. I think teachers spend a lot of time with the kids, they stay back after school and before school to help them with their subject whatever subject is, and I feel like based on my experience how I grew up studying education was the only thing right, academics was the only thing. And here I think kids are more well-rounded they are exposed to other extracurricular activities, it is a good mix and they have like especially when they are growing up like kindergarten elementary they should be treated like kids whereas in India back home it was always studying homework, homework.” (Female, Indian)

Another participant took a different approach and when asked about her academic expectations on her child and remarked, “we want her to be further along because I think the education system in America is a lot laid back at least the primary and the elementary levels,” (F-18). A third participant took measures even further and sent her daughter to a boarding school in India, because not only does she believe the education is better in India, but she did not like what she had heard about schools in the United States, such as, bullying, school shootings, and dating in the United States. The participants in the study were aware of the differences in the two education systems, but whether or not they chose to embrace the difference, wish it were more like the school system back home, or choose to send their child to a boarding school depended on their own parenting strategy.

As parents were from the Indian sub-continent but raising their children in the US, the idea of language and more specifically, what language their child/children speak was a common theme among many of the participants. It is to be noted that in eight of the interviews, language was never brought up. However, in all other interviews, when asked about language, 6

participants said that their children are bilingual, 2 noted that their children are fluent in English and can understand some of their mother tongue but are not fluent in it, and 3 participants said that their children only understand and speak English. The parents whose children were bilingual were pleased about this and noted that they were aiming to continue this throughout their children's lives because they want their children to know the culture they come from and feel that language is a powerful way to do so, but also for the practical reason that many of the participants' parents do not speak English, and they want their children to be able to converse with their grandparents. On the other extreme, the interviewees whose children only communicate in English felt that their children were missing part of their native culture, but were torn about if it was too late to try and teach them their native language and felt resigned to the fact that English was the only language that their children were going to speak. This speaks to the intergenerational gap that many immigrant families experience. The older generation is still holding onto the language, culture, and tradition of their old home country while the younger generation that was born in the new country is adapting more of the culture, language, and traditions of the new country. It can create parenting challenges and stressors for the family.

A big difference between the cultures of the US and the Indian Sub-Continent is that the US is a western individualistic society and the Indian Sub-Continent is a more traditional and collectivistic society. As stated in the previous paragraph, parents must face the reality that their children are growing up in a different type of culture than they did. When asked about the cultural differences, a participant remarked,

“Yes, you know, most of the things here, the culture and the independence and the individualism and all those things when they become, when they grow up. But Nepali culture... we are still in the traditional phase that we want to be responsible parents, we want to be responsible for our relatives; you know we value the culture and everything. Somehow, there is a contradiction. I do not really see most of the kids around here who are like ours.” (Female, Nepali)

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On the other hand, India and the Indian Sub-Continent itself is changing, but because many of the participants have been in the United States for a while now, they have an idealized version of their homeland in their heads that they subconsciously refer to. India is becoming more westernized, so even if some parents wanted to go back to India to teach their children more traditional culture and values, a lot of that is evolving and changing. A participant astutely pointed this out when she stated,

“When I see the kids in India I don’t see really any difference, what is going on in India, we watch on TV and they are trying to do this stupid you know copy western culture and they are trying to be show off and all and do everything but it is not our Indian culture.”  
(Female, Indian)

The participants want their children to understand their native culture while also embracing America. They understand that it is a balance and that their culture, traditions, values, and even languages are all in transition. A fear of some participants was that their children would become too American and become completely unattached from where they have come from. Each participant explained the ways in which they try and combine both cultures into their children’s lives.

“This is the way I think about it that we should balance between the two so we picked the best of both worlds and give it to them and make them understand through discussion... or at least have their opinions heard so that we can explain... That’s how I plan to tackle the culture difference between America and my native culture.” (Female, Indian)

While each participant had a different specific strategy for how they wanted to bridge the divide between the two cultures, what was abundantly clear in every single interview, was the idea, that they wanted the best for their children and were going to deal with acculturation and the stressors that follow, so that their children would be able to have adjusted bicultural lives.

### *Gender Differences*

The way that gender constructs and gender role ideology work in India is somewhat different from the way that it plays out in the United States. In India, gender roles are much more traditional in the sense that women are expected to be subservient under their husbands who are the breadwinners and the wives are the homemakers (Mehrotra 2016). Of course, there are exceptions to the rule, but this is the standard, and while this has changed in the United States, it has taken India a much longer and slower time to change. When immigrants come to the United States, they continue either to stay in their traditional state or begin to transition to more progressive and modern gender roles.

When asked about how their families operate, 7 participants described their families as traditional, with traditional gender roles.

“Yeah and in our family that is the model that we have in our family that the man should be the provider, the wife can be a supplementary provider, but the primary purpose and the role of a wife should be to make sure that the children be took good care. So that wife is a caregiver in a sense, but the father and the husband also have to also give care but primarily the father is responsible to be the breadwinner and the provider for the family. But more than anything else it’s about both the people are able to supplement each other’s duties. So that caregiver is being supplemented by the father’s supporting and the provider which is the father should also receive supplement. So my wife as a part time income earner is not all the year round but there is a supplementary provision so I think is more about sharing in each other responsibilities but we still believe that responsibility is primarily the man be the provider and the woman to be the care giver”. (Male, Indian)

This family is an example of a family with traditional gender roles. The father is the main provider and even defines himself as such, and the wife is the caretaker. Yes, she works part-time, but it is still a rule in the family that she does not work more than the husband and is expected to still take care of the home and the children. All 6 other participants who described their marital relationships as traditional had similar descriptions, with some husbands even stating that they would forbid their wives from ever working.



On the complete opposite of the spectrum, there is the non-traditional setting. One participant described her family as such. She was in school far away from her family, so her husband stayed with their children while she lived separately from them. When asked about their family situation she described it as follows:

“I think we both are in the same role. Right now, the kids are with him, so he has to give more time in taking care of them, but he supports financially and everything like... I also support him. We work together right there.” (Female, Indian)

What this participant is describing is considered non-traditional because her husband is the primary caregiver of their children now. That is something that is seen as a minority in the United States, especially in the immigrant population.

The other 6 participants who commented on this topic are in transition. They do not fit the mold of traditional gender roles, but they are not in non-traditional gender roles either. They are adapting and changing to the new freedoms that living in the United States allows, but also trying to balance what they were used to in India. One participant explains that she sometimes feels her husband does not quite understand that the US is more progressive, but that she tries to convey it to him, which is a perfect example of how their roles are in transition.

“Parenting uhhh, it keeps me have a little disagreement with my husband because he disagrees sometimes, you know, because it didn’t happen like this when he was a child and he would try and tell that that I didn’t do this at the time how can you do this now? But then I have discussed with him and explained to him you need to be aware that we are living in America, it is not like India. Even in India we have more freedom now, so you can’t expect the same way to be behavior. He understands so... but I have to step in.” (Female, Indian)

Other participants describe the ways in which they share responsibilities with their husband, especially when it comes to childcare.

“I appreciate him for all the things like the support for the child care and you know the rearing and he is involved a lot with the kids. He played a lot and does a lot for the kids. Because if both of us and both of the kids are at home and I cannot even sometimes cook

and I need his help and then I say okay you want to cook or you want to look after them and he would choose to play with kids.” (Female, Nepali)

The families in this category split chores, work, and child rearing. Some of the women in the study remarked that they wished their husbands did more, but they were still grateful for the help that their husbands did give. Hence, this is why these families are in transition. They recognize that the situation might not be perfect but that things are changing.

#### *Child-care/Parenting Strategies*

Parents all have their own personal strategies for how they want to parent and raise their children. In a perfect world, all resources would be available to parents to decide how to care for their children, but in reality, it depends on location, socioeconomic status, and culture. Culture plays the biggest factor in this choice, especially if the parent is an immigrant because tradition shapes their decisions. After sorting through the interviews, it was noted that 4 participants had help from their parents or in-laws, 2 participants enlisted a babysitter/nanny, 2 parents send their children to daycare, and 6 mothers stayed at home to care for their children, and 5 did not address the subject. It is to be noted that the analysis on this was done on children before they were of elementary school age.

The participants that had their parents or in-laws help with their children acknowledged that they were separate cases because most immigrants do not have their parents around with them because they are back home in India. Even these particular participants’ parents are living in India, but frequently visit and rotate with the in-laws to stay with and help take care of the family.

“Yeah it would be difficult for me to go to school again right now my husband is in a different city. He is in Columbus and I got admission to Akron so we are in two different cities so it would be really tough for me if my parents were not here. So, when I got admission they were here, and they took care of my kids. We did take turns sometimes

my parents are here and sometimes my in-laws are here so that way we are managing otherwise, it's really hard.” (Female, Nepali)

Since neither her parents or her in-laws live in the United States, they have to switch back and forth months at a time, due to visa complications. This can cause added stress for the family, but having the extra help is worth it to this participant, especially since in India, it is customary for family to take care of children and not use nannies or send them to daycare. This tradition is so ingrained in the culture that one participant sent her first child back to India when he was first born because she did not have enough money to raise him in the United States without help. She describes the situation below.

“So, I’m working for the same company since 2002 when I had my kids. In the beginning it was financially slow I send my son to India for a couple years. And then we got him back and then when I had my daughter I was working full time but I would have time at work and have time for home so I was able to manage it with the kids and then I had my in-laws taking helping me taking care of them.” (Female, Indian)

There were two participants who decided to hire nannies/babysitters to help take care of their children. This is less traditional in India and in Indian culture, because as stated previously, typically an outsider is not trusted to take care of the children, so a family member is enlisted to take care of them. However, since not all the participants’ family members were in America with them, participants needed to make other arrangements. A participant explains her reasoning for her childcare choices below.

“He is going to childcare workers home. He was in daycare in Syracuse. They were in daycare before, the both of them. But also, I did not really find a good child care center for my younger one so I found one like a child care person who works from her home. So, I just decided because I can tell something to her like you know it is more personal as compared to the same childcare. I am not really you know busy at this point. I am not working. I am just working on my research and the cost is also too much high to pay for the childcare cost.” (Female, Nepali)

Hiring a nanny, as stated above, can also have a cost benefit. It demonstrates that acculturation of the participants into a society that normalizes outsiders taking care of children. This is similar to

the choice to put children in daycare. Participants tended to place their children in daycare settings to acclimate their children to American culture and because they were working long hours.

The majority of participants in the study reported that the mother stayed at home and took care of the children. This falls into the traditional gender roles that are held in India, where the father is the breadwinner and the mother stays at home and is the caretaker. It is to be noted that sometimes it was due to visa status where the mother could not work and so she therefore would take care of the children because she was forced to stay home, but for the most part it was a choice. For example, one mother stated,

“I don’t believe in babysitter. If you are the parent and you have the option to be at home and be with your kids, so why not parent yourself?” (Female, Indian)

Once again this demonstrates the idea that this culture prefers to have family raise the children and not opt to have someone else take care of the children. Another participant explains her decision as follows.

“Ya I stayed home for 5 years, I started, I quit my job after he was born, and I stayed home for 5 years. Once he started kindergarten then I started, then I went back to work, and I am only working part-time so, I am home when he is home.” (Female, Indian)

The child-care choices of the participants represent the culture of India and the traditional values that a collectivist and traditional society have. While it is demonstrated that some of the families are in transition, a number of the families are still trying to raise their children the ways that they themselves were raised as children in India. They understand that it cannot be exactly the same, but the mistrust of outsiders, the yearning for family to help, and the sole responsibility falling on the mother is all still at the core of the participants’ child rearing choices.

## **Household Work**

### *Chores and Cooking*

When discussing the work done around the house, two themes emerged. Participants either fell into the traditional category with the wife doing the cleaning and cooking and the husband engaged in the paid workforce, or they fell into the non-traditional/transitioning category where chores and cooking were split. When asked about how household work was divided in their home, 7 participants fell into the traditional category, 11 participants were categorized as transitioning, and 2 participants did not mention anything.

In India, the majority of families have the traditional roles. Most men do not learn how to cook, so moving to America can be a wakeup call, or they will never learn to cook and put all the responsibility on their wives. One participant explains:

“He doesn’t know how to cook, so he is just like when he is trying to cook, he needs some more instructions, so I do cooking... then I never stopped.” (Female, Nepali)

Another participant remarked:

“I am home, and he goes to work. I mostly cook and he can make his own tea. That’s it,” (Female, Indian).

It is simply accepted that their husbands cannot and will not contribute to the family chores. This is even further demonstrated by a male participant who was working in the United States, but his wife and child were back in India hypothesized about what he would want and expect if his family were in the states with him.

“I would like my wife to work if she was here, but not more than me, as I will need all the home cooked meal and clean house when I get home.” (Male, Indian).

On the other hand, a majority of participants in the study are transitioning to share household tasks and cooking. As more of the immigrant families are becoming two-parent working households, it is not just falling on the mother to carry the sole burden of the mother to do the second shift of coming home from work and taking care of the home as well. A participant explained her reasoning for how and why she shares the chores with her husband.

“It’s not like my husband is the only earning one, I am also earning just like him. So, we have to share some responsibilities. This may not be the same work, but we share the job different chores at home, we share everything that is the only way we can work. If I was staying home all the time, yes maybe I could take more responsibilities, but since I’m also working, I don’t have intent, coming home to work, from work and then do all the house chores right. I have made it very clear when we got married, we have to share.”  
(Female, Indian)

This participant set clear expectations from the beginning about sharing responsibilities at home.

The female participants were more -aware of how much they were participating in comparison to their husbands and seemed to wish they were helping more than they do, as demonstrated by this participant.

“Somehow my husband, when he has a time, he also helps me a lot like taking care of the kids or clean the house, yes something like that. He is helpful too, but he cannot meet my expectations,” (Female, Nepali).

However, there were participants that truly split the chores 50/50, as explained by this participants chore routine with his wife.

“Cooking can be done by everyone, like, for example, today is Saturday, tomorrow Sunday, so all the house work starting from cleaning the house, cooking, washing, all I do that, because I am free, and she works. Then Monday and Tuesday whatever work is to be done at home is done by my wife because she is free Monday and Tuesday.” (Male, Bhutanese)

The changing landscape of the way household chores are being performed, demonstrates the transition in all aspects from traditional collectivist culture, to the more Western and individualistic culture that pervades in the United States.

## **Discussion**

### *Conclusion*

Participants in this study balanced their native culture with the new culture of the United States. In each category, the main take-away theme was the idea of transition. Participants acknowledged the changing landscape around them and the majority of them found ways to adapt and grow with it, while still incorporating traditions and customs from their country of origin. Overall, the women welcomed this change and embraced it more than the men in the study. This falls in line with previous studies on this topic conducted by Dasgupta (1998), Mehrotra and Calasanti (2010), and Gupta (2006). Not only are different couples at different levels of acculturation, but within the couple each parent might be at a different level as well, which can lead to differences in parenting strategies. In the long-term, not being on the same page as a family unit can cause many stressors and influence the children in a negative way. Without outside supports, this will not change if immigrants from the Indian Sub-Continent continue to be one of the fastest growing immigrant populations but a minority in terms of studied and catered to populations. The data from this study demonstrates that while most families are in transition, that transition can be a difficult and stressful time where help would greatly influence the family in an incredibly positive way.

### *Limitations and Future Research*

There were limitations in the study. All interviews were conducted in English; hence the sample is restricted to immigrants from the Indian sub-continent who were fluent in English. This self-selected group tends to be highly educated with high income levels. Future research needs to include non-English speaking immigrants from the Indian sub-continent as well. Another limitation of the study is the use of self-reported data because of the issue of social desirability. Future research needs to include multiple methods such as observations and multiple informants in data collection

Since this study was to explore the ways in which immigrants from the Indian Sub-Continent face parenting challenges, a follow-up study would be to focus on the children of immigrants from the Indian Sub-Continent. This would allow researchers to examine how these parents' behaviors influences the growth, development, and acculturation of first and second-generation children from the Indian Sub-Continent. As previously stated, since this is a population of immigrants that is vastly understudied and under supported, it would allow more knowledge to be accumulated and therefore, the appropriate services can be administered to benefit them.



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